

like birds on a wire

by sarsaparillia

Category: Oxenfree  
Genre: Horror, Romance  
Language: English  
Characters: Alex, Jonas  
Pairings: Alex/Jonas  
Status: Completed  
Published: 2016-04-12 01:45:03  
Updated: 2016-04-12 01:45:03  
Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:34:33  
Rating: T  
Chapters: 1  
Words: 2,829  
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net  
Summary: Alex, stumbling through the time-stream. "Alex/Jonas.

like birds on a wire

**\*\*disclaimer\*\***: disclaimed.

><strong>dedication<strong>: to alma. if i go down, so do you.

><strong>notes<strong>: y'all can say what you want, but there was NOTHING platonic about the way alex and jonas interacted so JUST LET ME LIVE

**\*\*title\*\***: like birds on a wire

><strong>summary<strong>: Alex, stumbling through the time-stream. "Alex/Jonas.

"

.

.

.

.

.

As for me, I'm"

[ "\_rewind; you're not allowed to forget, alex. you know that. try again\_.]

"

She doesn't get to have them both.

It must be one of the laws of the universe, or something. If Michael lives, all Jonas is ever going to be is a friend. If Michael dies, well, Michael's dead, and that's not a state of the union that Alex is about to be okay with. When her brother died the first time, things broke. They just. They broke.

And Alex is so tired of things breaking.

So: she doesn't get to have them both. She gets Clarissa waking her up at obscene hours when she crawls over her legs in through the window so that she doesn't trip the door alarms. She gets Ren with his arm around Nona's shoulders rattling off facts about roosters because he's been on an agriculture kick and Ren can't stop talking if his life depends on it. She gets Nona thumbing through prom dress catalogues, kind of grinning out of the corner of her mouth. She gets to have Jonas, his fingers curled around the xbox controller while he lounges on the couch. She gets to have Michael, messy-haired and grinning in the kitchen sunlight and alive.

But she doesn't get to have them both.

She's not sure what kind of trade-off it is. There are days she wakes up and can't move for the sickness of it. But Michael is Michael and it's— it's not like she was so great at functioning without him, okay. She wasn't. She really, really wasn't.

Because whatever else Edwards Island is, it's consequences are long-reaching.

The reset happens anywhere from six months to a year; it just depends how good she's been about remembering. It hangs over her head, every interaction tainted with it; some days, Alex thinks that not knowing was so much better, because at least then she wasn't always flinching back from the press of Jonas' hand on her shoulder.

At least when she didn't remember, it didn't hurt so much.

The ghosts don't seem to like that, though. That she didn't remember that they put her there must have rankled, or that she didn't recognize them for what they were right from the beginning when she'd already lived this so many times. The earliest resets are still blurry, and Alex only knows those happened because they had to have happened. It's the way they talk, you did and you have and you will, like all of time is an infinite loop and somewhere along the way, she did something that fundamentally broke it.

(Ha, broke. Like it's not breaking all the time.)

She remembers every reset, now. The press of the radio in her pocket is a familiar thing, hiding its blue-green frequencies in the heavy lining of Michael's coat. It doesn't record, but it's always good for eerie little jingles when she's wandering around town. The echoes of it are a reminder that all of this, all of it, it could be gone any second.

She looks at her brother and her other brother, and wonders where she went wrong.

Because the thing is, she's played this game. She knows how this goes. It's not like she hasn't lived it so many times she can't even count, anymore. It's not like there's anything she hasn't said. It's not like there's anything she hasn't \_tried\_.

The outcome is always the same.

Michael comes back to life, Jonas isn't her step-brother, and the radio still plays.

(One reset she chunked the thing over the railing of the ferry, just to see if she could. The reset was so jarring that her head hurt for days. She hasn't tried it since; it's not worth the headache.)

"Jesus, Alex, you're spacing out again."

"Do I ever do anything else?" she shoots back. It's sometime in August, late summer heat dripping thick and sweaty down her spine, and the sun's been down for hours. She told him that she was the kind of girl who passed out at eleven with her hand still in the chip bowl, and maybe once upon a time, she was. "God, put that thing out, it \_smells\_ like cancer."

Jonas laughs, sharp and hacking. He puts out the smoke on the railing, all the knobs and knuckles of his hands contorting with the movement of it. It leaves a black mark against the pale metal, like a scar. Alex only has a second to stare at it before he wipes it away, sends the stub sailing down into the gloom below. There are fairy lights strung all up over the backyard, but the glow doesn't reach Alex's bedroom, and the only indication that there's a party going on at all is the spill of laughter out the front door and the faint \_thud\_ of the bass up through the floor.

Michael always did love a good party. She can hear him shouting with Ren aboutâ€"something. Who even knows, these days, the engineering shit her brother can spout off on command makes her head spin, and Ren's no better. They're the worst closed-circuit feedback loop, honestly, and they only get \_worse\_ when Jonas ends up in the mix. They are every bad joke she's ever stifled a laugh at, times like \_eighty million\_.

God, Alex loves them so absurdly.

It's Jonas' elbow in her ribs that brings her back.

"You did it again," he says, not unkindly. "Twice in ten minutes. I think that's a record."

"Shut up," Alex says. Her lips twitch, threatening to curl into a smile. It feels like she hasn't smiled in a year. "Like you're any better, you totally drifted off earlier when Nona was talking about applications. How's \_that\_ for spacing out?"

"\_Ow\_," he deadpans, "my feeling."

"Your feeling?"

"Last time I checked, I only had the one," Jonas grins out of the

corner of his mouth. His teeth are a flash in the dark, and for a sickening crunch of a half-second, Alex thinks this is it, we're going to reset, you're going to forget me—"

But the ghosts are quiet, no static as her vision hazes over and screeches like a badly-rewound tape. In the interim she flinches, goes silent. It goes on long enough to catch Jonas' attention, and he frowns down at her, eyebrows pulling together.

"Do you ever stop thinking about it, Alex?" he asks, so painfully gentle. He doesn't even have to specify what it is, because it's late and they're both long past pretending. Senior year hasn't even started this go around. She thinks of his eyes lit paper-lantern red, we're trapped in another loop, the hopeless tug of his mouth before the blast door like he'd give anything to have two more seconds with his mother even if it doomed them all. She couldn't blame him for it then. She can't blame him for it now.

"No," Alex says. She closes her eyes. "Never."

He doesn't tell her that she has to let it go, that it's going to eat her alive if she doesn't. The island is still too close, and even if he doesn't know everything, he knows enough. Instead, he slips his arms around her shoulders to tug her into the curve of his body. Alex goes without a fuss. In the dark red wash of her closed eyelids, it's easier to trust him than it should be.

"Hey, Alex—" Jonas says. It feels like a long time later, but time is weird and elastic when Alex is involved. The sky is that pale blue-green it turns just before the indigo of true night sets in along the fuzzy line of the horizon where the ocean and the atmosphere merge. No stars, but there never are, anymore.

"What?"

"Have you ever been in love with anyone?"

Alex blinks up at him. Something churns in her stomach, a low pulsing warning, but it's not a warning she understands. She understands blaring panic and clawing horror, but this creeping paralysis is something else entirely. He's just looking at her, eyebrows pulled together as he kind of frowns. It's an intensive study, and she thinks of time loops, a soccer ball, bringing dead brothers back to life. Truth or slap on the beach, Ren and Nona holding hands, bomb shelters and blinking lights.

Michael and Jonas. Jonas and Michael.

(Oh god, she knows she doesn't get to have them both.)

"Don't ask me that," Alex says, and means it. This isn't fair. It isn't fair. Of all the things the ghosts have given and taken, this is the ugliest. It wrenches all the dark and sticky places inside of her, turns all her guts into knots. "For real, don't."

Jonas ducks a little closer, and suddenly fair doesn't matter anymore.

"What are you doing," she says. It's not a question.

"I don't know." It's not an answer. She doesn't remember the green in his eyes. That's different.

"You should maybe work on that," Alex's breath hitches in her throat, the linoleum siding of the house digging into her back. It sticks like skin against leather and Jonas is so close, so close, his arm pressed to the house in a curve above her head and bent down so that they're face to face, nose to nose. God, he's been brother and best friend but never this, never this and she hasn't let herself think about it for so many reasons, so many good reasons because—  
"You should definitely, y'know, work on that."

"How am I supposed to work on it? You're always running away," he says, gaze darting back and forth across her face. He's watching her like she's something wild, and he hesitates before continuing. "You haven't stopped running since the island."

Well, he's not wrong.

Her hands are fisted in his shirt. It's a conscious effort to unclench them, to let him go. It's fucked up, but she doesn't have a script for this. Alex has lived a hundred lifetimes since she tuned into the source all that time ago, but this isn't a song she knows.

She's forgotten how to be spontaneous. One more thing to add to the list, the deconstruction of herself lost in bits and pieces and stubby cut-off radio waves. Teal hair and freckles and her brother's old coat: Alex has forgotten how to be anything else.

"I love you," she exhales it like a secret, because it's true. She drops her forehead to his chest, shakes her head very slowly. She loves him, she loves him, she loves him. Sharper and harder and faster than Ren or Nona or Clarissa or even Michael, Michael who she can't look at some days because she remembers what it was like when he was dead and no one else has a clue. There are several lifetimes of grief packed inside of her, all in cups of coffee and static crackle and eternal loops of time, and Alex can't—Alex can't.

"I love you, too," Jonas says. There is such resignation in his face. "Sorry. I shouldn't have—"are you okay?"

Yeah, Alex says, tries to say, thinks because she can't actually get the words out, I'm fine.

But she's not fine, and she's not been fine, and she's not going to be fine. Even if—even if she kisses him, now, lets him kiss her, allows the thing that's brewed between them since the beginning to erupt into flames, it's not going to last. The ghosts will reset everything, and she'll end up right back at the start. It will be Edwards Island all over again, only the next run will have the added dimension of new memory. vu, unspooling in reverse.

And Jonas won't remember.

"Alex?" he asks. "You in there?"

Alex nods into his shoulder. It's just—the words, they're not the right ones, she won't be able to get them out. She just needs a

minute, that's all, a minute or an hour or a day or a year or, god, a lifetime, two lifetimes. How do people do this without freaking out? How do theyâ€"? How?

"Take your time. I'll just get comfortable," Jonas says. She thinks he's kidding. He sounds like he's kidding. But maybe he's not, because his arms come up to curl around her waist and he just holds onto her. This isn't new; they're both physical people, and Alex is prone to looping herself around the people she cares about. But for that second-minute-hour-lifetime that she needs, here in the lee of Jonas' body, she's sort of, almost, tentatively okay.

"You'llâ€"it'll change things," Alex says.

"I think we've lived through worse," Jonas says.

Well, Alex can't deny that. She scrunches up her face in his shoulder, trying to find an argument that isn't what if it messes everything up even worse than it already is. It's not an argument that makes sense to anyone but her, and besides, it's not like it's going to matter in the long run. They have lived through worse, and eventually the ghosts will want to play again. The reset hangs heavy around her shoulders.

"We'll still be friends, right?" Alex asks his shoulder, muffled. She's got strands of hair in her mouth, and they taste like nothing at all. She almost misses metallic chemical burn of the bleach. "Even if it sucks?"

"It's not gonna suck, Als," he says, very softly.

"How do you know?"

"I just know."

Alex searches through herself for courage, that bright-edged flame that keeps her going even when nothing makes sense. Even when the ghosts have taken Clarissa and dropped her body out a two-story window, even when Ren's drowning, even when Michael's dead. It kept her going through the worst night of her life, relived a hundred thousand times, and it keeps her going now. She swallows back bile, and pulls away to look up at him.

His face is the same as it always is, kind-eyed and crooked-grinned. There's the line of his nose, the cut of his jaw, and they are all things that Alex knows as well as she knows her own face. Jonas isn't a surprise, except when he is. He's not wearing the beanie, and his hair is all sticky-out all over the place.

"You need a haircut," Alex manages.

"You need a dye job," Jonas says. "Blonde doesn't suit you."

"Wow, rude," she tells him, and tilts her head up to catch his lips.

For one glorious second, nothing happens at all. Nothing happens but lips against lips, and her heart leaps in her throat because maybe this is it, maybe they're out, maybe she gets to have this, Michael

laughing downstairs with his arm around Clarissa, everyone she cares about alive and fine and maybe she gets to have them both, maybe it's going to be \_okay\_ this time.

Alex gasps, pulls in one great gulp of air.

"Jonas, Iâ€" "

[\_SCCCTCCHH\_â€" \_please, alex. like it would be so easy. again.  
\_\_\*\*again\*\*\_\_. SCTCCHHHHCKKK\_â€" ]

The breath goes out of her.

Alex sinks down to the hardwood of her bedroom. Her knees \_pop\_. It's barely a sound at all beneath the hissing of her blood through her veins, midday sunlight sinking into her skin. Resets are always jarring, especially when she's not expecting them. She can still taste Jonas' mouth, all mint and ash.

"You know, I shouldn't be so surprised," Alex says, wearily, to no one in particular as she picks herself up off the floor. "You \_would\_ think this was funny."

The radio in her pocket crackles to life, and over the waves it comes:

Laughter.

â€" "

.

.

.

.

.

\_fin\_.

End  
file.